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AUTHOR	Baker, Thomas E.
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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses changes in England's teacher education, using data from interviews, literature, and observation. The research examined how teachers and teacher educators responded to sweeping changes imposed on schools and education following the Education Reform Act of 1988. Both the United States and England experience significant criticism of teachers and teacher education from elected officials and the press. The British government has increased its control of teacher education over the past 2 decades. There are efforts to move teacher education responsibility from universities to schools. The National Curriculum dictates about 80 percent of the content in primary and secondary schools. Its increased emphasis on math, science, and design technology has schools of education struggling to catch up. The recent Labour government brought little change in education policies created by the Conservative government. However, it endorsed the Teacher Training Agency's role in setting benchmark standards to initial teacher training. U.S. educational policymakers can learn many lessons from England's experience, and they must reexamine several notions e.g., that they can improve teacher education by merely enacting prescriptive, restrictive laws; raise teacher quality by moving teacher training into schools; candidates will flock to teaching if it is easier to bypass university-based teacher education; and carrot-and-stick funding motivates true improvement in education. They must showcase successful grassroots efforts toward reform and collaboration, and they should realize that mandated change has repercussions on the educational system. (Contains 28 references.) (SM)

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Who Should Control Teacher Education? Lessons from England

Thomas E. Baker
Professor of Education
Austin College
Sherman TX 75090-4440
tbaker@austinc.edu

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Who Should Control Teacher Education? Lessons from England

Thomas E. Baker
Austin College

PURPOSE

The primary objective of this presentation is to share information about changes in teacher education in England, drawing on recent visits, interviews,and the current literature. A second objective is to engage participants in a discussion of the role of government policy in reforming teacher education. The debate over teacher education in England echoes themes heard in this country and offers cautions for U. S. teacher education policy makers.

BACKGROUND

In November 1996, David Imig contended that "teacher education policy and practice in this country is influenced substantially by events in the United Kingdom, particularly by Conservative Party policies that have changed British schooling and teacher education." (Imig, 1996) Forming a similar hypothesis some months before, the author, an American teacher educator, had arranged on-site visits and interviews at universities and schools in England over a period of several weeks during Spring 1997. The purpose of the investigation was to discover how teachers and teacher educators were responding to the sweeping changes imposed on schools and teacher training (as the British say) as a result of the Education Reform Act (ERA) of 1988 and its subsequent additions, refinements and modifications. This paper will focus primarily on teacher training, but will sometimes refer to the mandated primary and secondary National Curriculum and its accompanying tests.

While one must be careful not to overstate what may be superficial similarities -- or differences -- in countries' educational policies and practices (Furlong, 1997), or even to mistake the direction of and the motives for "policy borrowing" (Halpin &

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Troyna, 1995), there are nevertheless interesting lessons for U. S. educational policy makers in the aftermath of the rapid, radical changes imposed on British education over the last decade. In both countries, teachers and teacher training have been subjected to caustic criticism from elected officials and the popular press. (Carvel & Wainwright, 1997; Dodd, 1996; Driscoll, 1996; Judd, 1997) Beverly Shaw's scathing conservative critique, *Teacher Training: the Misdirection of British Teaching*, published in 1986, said that teacher trainers failed to convey basic teaching skills and were fundamentally social engineers with collectivist views. It was followed in 1988 by Anthony O'Hear's equally critical *Who Teaches the Teachers*, which advocated greater content knowledge for teachers and decried the "teacher-training establishment", arguing that there is no body of knowledge concerning teaching and learning. (Brundrett, 1997)

Both U. S. and British conservative politicians have advocated market place competition among schools (Capel, 1996), and in Britain, they have prevailed. Paradoxically, in both countries, we see education reform efforts that call for both decentralization (alternative routes to teacher licensing, school choice, site based decision making) and greater centralization (prescribed curriculum in schools and in teacher training, standardized testing, and "strings" on funding).

In Furlong's and Maynard's words (1995), the fourteen major Education Acts passed by Parliament between 1979 and 1995 "sought to 'rein in' the autonomy of the teaching profession." Townshend (1994) asserts that the British government has been increasing its control of teacher training over the last two decades, with prescribed standards, content, and length of student teaching, as well as alternative routes to Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) that bypass university based teacher training programs. However, it is ERA, fully implemented in the early 1990s, that has most radically changed teacher training and public school curriculum. The Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (CATE), created only in 1984, was eliminated. The

Teacher Training Agency (TTA) now prescribes policy and controls funding for all teacher training programs. Teams of the newly created Office of Standards in Education (OFSTED), some of whose members are not educators, are responsible for evaluating both teacher training programs and schools, in the latter case replacing the respected British system of school inspection. (Wilson, 1996)

One of ERA's primary components is School-Centered Initial Teacher Training (SCITT), an effort to move teacher education responsibility from the universities to the schools. Although field experiences had been an essential -- and growing -- part of initial teacher training in Britain for years (Galvin, 1996), the legislation implies that preservice teachers spend most of their time on university campuses, isolated from schools. But instead of merely encouraging closer relationships between schools and universities, TTA now directs twenty-five per cent of a teacher training program's funds directly to its partner schools. Many teacher educators feel threatened and marginalized by this heavy handed approach, and school personnel are reluctant to take on additional training responsibility, particularly in light of increased pressure on the schools from the National Curriculum and standardized testing. (Furlong & Smith, 1996) Researchers in the PACE project (Primary Assessment Curriculum and Experience) found that teachers were mostly supportive of the National Curriculum when it was promulgated, but grew increasingly distressed by the rapid pace of implementation and the amount of content to be "covered." (Osborn, 1992; Broadfoot *et al.*, 1994; Croll, 1996) Beginning in March 1997, the publication in newspapers of the League Tables, test scores for every school in England and Wales, has increased the pressure on teachers and head teachers, especially in light of school choice legislation. One can hypothesize that teachers under such stress have less time and desire to serve as trainers for preservice teachers.

No university teacher educator the author interviewed questioned the benefit of greater collaboration with the schools. Many said that they were already doing that,

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while others commented somewhat ruefully that it meant a great deal of extra time and work, though it was worthwhile. What all objected to was TTA's one-size-fits all approach, and its arbitrary (and seemingly inefficient) control of funds. The head of teacher training at one university complained in March 1997 that she still had not received her budget for the 1996-97 academic year!

Interestingly, Britain does not test teacher candidates before licensing, as many U. S. states now do, but OFSTED does assess a program's graduates in a disturbingly indirect, hit-and-miss fashion. An OFSTED school inspector who observes a novice teacher and finds his or her lesson deficient may "write up" the program from which the teacher graduated, triggering follow-up scrutiny, prescribed program improvement, and conceivably, elimination of a certification field with subsequent loss of funds. (1)

The National Curriculum, "tightly prescribed and covering a wide range of [traditional school] subjects" (Hughes, 1997), has put further pressure on teacher training. It now dictates about eighty per cent of the content in primary and secondary schools, actually a scaling back in response to teacher complaints. With the National Curriculum's increased emphasis on "maths", science, and design technology, schools and teacher training programs are struggling to catch up. There is evidence that many current student teachers lack the in-depth knowledge to adequately teach those portions of the demanding National Curriculum. (Bennett & Carre, 1996)

MOST RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

Tony Blair's stunning Labour victory in the spring of 1997 has brought little change in education policies enacted by the Conservative government. In October of 1997, the National Union of Teachers (NUT) criticized the Labor government's white paper, "Excellence in Schools", as having good intentions, but failing to address teachers' real concerns, such as low public esteem and inordinate workload. (Classes approaching forty are not unheard of, although the government has announced a plan

to keep classes of five to seven year olds below thirty.) NUT General Secretary Doug McAvoy decried the government's continued use of "name and shame" tactics, citing a NUT poll that shows teachers see no value in the National Curriculum and oppose publication of League Tables. (Rafferty, 1997) Alisdair MacDonald, head of Morpeth Comprehensive School in east London, rebuked Blair's administration for spending "too much time bashing teachers and peddling out-of-date myths about schools" like his. (Spencer, 1997)

David Blunkett has replaced Gillian Shepherd as Secretary for Education and Employment, but Conservative appointee Chris Woodhead, despite his extreme unpopularity with teachers and teacher educators, has been retained as head of OFSTED. His teams are now inspecting and "grading" teacher training institutions, and the findings will be published in the first League Tables for Initial Teacher Training in July 1998. Inspection data is being used to threaten some institutions with the withdrawal of accreditation, including two highly regarded universities. Teacher educators are constantly facing OFSTED inspections because teams evaluate an institution's courses (we would say certification programs) separately. Dr. Steve Hodkinson of Brunel University reported in late December of 1997 that his institution has escaped the hit list so far by showing big improvements, but "we still have five inspections this year which could affect our future." (2)

The Blair government has endorsed TTA's role in setting benchmark standards for initial teacher training. New ones were published in July of 1997. (OFSTED: TTA, 1997a & 1997b; Department for Education & Employment, 1997) The Education Bill introduced in December 1997 would reinstate a probationary year for teachers along with a new induction program. Last fall, TTA announced major goals for upgrading the teaching profession, including:

1. Have at least three applicants for every teacher training place.
2. Require applicants to a Post-Graduate Course in Education (PGCE) to hold at

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least an upper-second class degree. (PGCE, university-based post-baccalaureate initial teacher training, is an increasingly popular route to QTS. In 1996-97, 85% of all secondary candidates were in a PGCE, and a growing number of primary candidates chose it as well.)

3. Draw at least 80% of B. Ed. students from the top 20% of their secondary school class.

4. Raise the status of teachers so that "by 2000, it is one of the top three professions young people wish to join."

These goals are highly optimistic in light of the declining number of students interested in pursuing teacher training. In fact, some fear that teacher training programs may feel pressured to accept *less* qualified students in order to survive. Mary Russell, Secretary of the University Council for the Education of Teachers (UCET), has expressed sympathy for the goals, but calls them too simplistic, saying they could keep out potentially good teachers. Russell also predicted that UCET would resist TTA's continuing attempts to push SCITT. (Gardiner, 1997)

Throughout Britain, head teachers are concerned as the perennial shortage of qualified teachers in maths, science, and modern languages spreads to other teaching fields. (Froude, 1997) TTA's new "No One Forgets a Good Teacher" campaign is now broadcasting radio and cinema spots that feature actors, professional athletes, and other celebrities talking about their teachers. Critics doubt these ads will encourage many young people to enter the teaching profession. As a British professor of education wrote me recently, "Sadly, none of these stars decided to be teachers." He added, "New government, no change."

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Almost four years ago, Harry Judge (1994), renowned Professor of Education at Oxford, wrote that "teacher education in England is now without a home."

Despite Judge's pessimistic assessment, the author found that his informants are laboring on, discouraged and frustrated but not yet defeated, as they continue to teach their courses, supervise student teachers, work with schools, and engage in professional activities. However, with continuing political and economic pressure from the national government along with declining interest in teaching careers among Britain's young people, the lot of today's British teacher educator is surely not a happy one. As I heard one British professor of education say recently, the government seems to regard her and her colleagues as children unable to make sound decisions for themselves.

What are some lessons from England for U. S. teacher education policy makers? First, they should re-examine certain notions prevalent in both countries: that we can improve teacher education merely by enacting prescriptive, restrictive laws; that we will raise teacher quality by simply shoving teacher training into schools; that hordes of stronger candidates will flock to teaching if we make it easier to bypass university-based teacher education-- very few aspiring teachers in England and Wales are choosing the "on-the-job" route to QTS (Schnur, 1995) -- while at the same time raising questionable barriers for applicants to teacher education programs; and that "carrot and stick" funding, with the emphasis on stick, motivates true improvement in education. Second, they should showcase successful "grass roots" efforts at reform and collaboration, encouraging innovation and diversity rather than rigid standardization. Last, educational policy makers should be aware that mandated change in one part of the educational system has repercussions in its other parts. We cannot ignore the working conditions and compensation of practicing teachers when we talk of strengthening initial teacher education. We cannot approach k-12 reform and teacher education reform as separate issues, or even as tangentially related ones. They are inseparably linked.

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Notes

1. Interview with Jean Howard, Head of Secondary Teacher Training, St. Mary's University, UK, March 11, 1997
2. E-mail correspondence from Steve Hodkinson, Professor of Education, Brunel University, UK, December 14, 1997

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